

ITALIAN'S NEWS

TUTTA L'ITALIA DEL MONDO

Without making too much noise

Latin music column by Mario Díaz

9 AUGUST 2020

Robert Jeand'or, an Aruban whose contributions to the merengue make him a Dominican

MARIO DIAZ [LATINA](#), [MUSIC](#) 0



Without doubt, the master Robert Jeand'or is the most Dominican Aruban we have ever known.

Since settling in the Dominican Republic, where he arrived through the efforts of a merengue giant, Johnny Ventura, this singer, musician, arranger, composer, music producer and conductor has made significant contributions to the rhythm commanded by the güira and dallatambora, the one that best identifies the idiosyncrasy of Dominicans.

Always kind, humble and with a soul devoid of meanness, this chivalrous artist puts his talent at the service of the merengue and, therefore, of all the gear that drives him.

Robert Hubert JeanD'or Bermúdez was born on 10 May 1954 in Aruba, a territory that until 1986 was part of the Netherlands Antilles and today of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. He is the son of Francisco Reinier JeanD'or of Curaçao and Cecilia Bermúdez, of Aruba, who worked respectively on the aqueduct and in the hospital in Aruba. Don Francisco died in 1972 and Doña Cecilia in 2005.

Pay attention that I wrote JeanD'or and not Jeand'or, because the first is the correct surname of this family, but for reasons of artistic management, Robert was given that of Jeand'or. And it was good that the apostrophe was not removed leaving it alone in Jeandor!

His passion for music came from his father, who guided him when Robert took his first steps in music studies.

"My father was my first music teacher: he wrote all the chords for me in a notebook and there, when I was just six, I started learning to play the Venezuelan cuatro and, after a while, the guitar" he recalled.

But not only in Robert's veins was musical talent, but also his brothers Francisco (Frank), who played guitar and mandolin, Marlene and Percey, both guitarists, Robertina and John who sang, Ismael was bassist and Michael gave himself to do with percussion. Many of Robert's brothers are already dead: Ismael and Sofía (2010), Frank (2013) and John (2014). Sofia was a nurse.

In the neighborhood where he was born, called Madiki, with great frequency he could see his brothers playing almost every night, together, in the family, with his father at the helm, and this is how he was captured by the desire to integrate into the family clan as musician and this soon led him to play the guitar.

"One night my brother Frank came home and told me there was a group playing Christmas carols that needed a cuatrista to reinforce. The group was called Las Blancas Palomitas and was directed by Severiano Luidens, where his relatives Evelien and Jossy Luidens also stood out, "said Robert Jeand'or, who was only eight at the time and, indulging in laughter, added that the only black guy was him.

He said that his encounter with the bass was fortuitous, because during a presentation of the group the bassist did not show up, for lack of transport, and therefore Robert, who was a child of about nine or ten years, embraced the powerful stringed instrument and solved the problem that caused the absence of the titular instrumentalist.

“I took the bass in my hands, without ever having played it before and since the strings are tuned in the same order as the guitar, I said I would play it. I played that night and that's how I started playing it and to this day it's my favorite instrument,” he recalled.

The artist said he then entered a music academy to study bass and singing. In both subjects his teacher was the now extinct Aruban teacher Rufo Odor and in harmony the also deceased teacher Eddy Bennet, from Argentina.

In his youth, at the age of 8 - 9, and in the role of cuatro interpreter and singer, he was briefly with the pianist Albert Dieffenthaler, with whom he gave presentations on various television programs, in hotels and bars.

At just 14 years old, in 1968, he joined Los Juveniles, the first orchestra where he participated as bassist, singer, composer and arranger. With this group, with which he became famous in his native region, in three consecutive years (from 1976 to 1978) he obtained the Tumba Award, an annual celebration that is part of the Aruba carnivals. By the way, Jeand'or would later win that award again in two consecutive years (1990 and 1991).

In 1974 he made his first recording, composed and arranged by himself: “Ta di nos e tá”, a phrase that translated means: “It is ours”.

In 1978 Robert Jeand'or was crowned King of the Tumba, after having interpreted the song “Bolombonchi”, written by Vicente Kelly, Víctor Oduber and by Jeand'or himself, which was later recorded by the famous Colombian artist Joe Arroyo, who died in 2016. That impressive performance was heard by Johnny Ventura, who performed there with his orchestra, and El Caballo Mayor approached the Aruban singer to see if he was interested in trying his luck abroad.

As that experience was developing, Jeand'or kept adding new musical knowledge to his collection and supplemented what he already knew about harmony and composition.

In 1979 he launched with the La Nueva Fuerza orchestra the musical production entitled Rey Di Tumba 1976-77-78, recorded in the Fidelis studio in Caracas, Venezuela, and with the support of Aruba Recording Studio, where he experiments with Latin, folk and country. giving us songs like “Ban bonse”, “Ata mi cos”, “Manera un wiei”, “Slip'e”, “Bolombonchi”, “Pusha bai aden”, “M'y yega” and “Canta cu mi awor”.

Many do not know that Robert Jeand'or was one step away from joining the Great Combo of Puerto Rico, after the departure of Andy Montañez. Jeand'or was invited to take the stage with La Universidad de la Salsa, during a presentation at the Caiquetio club, and performed “El barbero loco”. His voice struck Don Rafael Ithier and the staff of the famous group. After Montañez moved to La Dimensión Latina, Ventura called Master Ithier and advised Jeand'or to fill the position in the Niño de Tras Talleres, to which Ithier replied that he knew him, but had already recruited Jerry Rivas. A delay with the North American visa is also said to have occurred.

Jeand'or was very close to being part of La Dimensión Latina, because both when Oscar de León left this orchestra and when Montañez did too, the arubegno's name was mentioned to join this Venezuelan group. They looked for him where he worked, but he was already in Santo Domingo with Los Hijos del Rey.

Similarly, during a visit by Larry Harlow to the island of Aruba, the Wonderful Jew saw Jeand'or singing and told Vicente Kelly, who recently passed away this year (2020) and a friend of the popular singer, bassist and arranger, that he would take Jeand'or to New York, as he needed someone to fill the void left in his orchestra by Junior González (died May 10, 2012) and Kelly responded positively, but that promise remained in the air.

In the midst of all this, the Aruban artist chose to join the Los Hijos del Rey orchestra in 1979 and settle in Santo Domingo.

“It was Johnny Ventura who spoke to me so that I could be a musician in the Dominican Republic and getting there was a great experience. In the Dominican capital, the first recording I made was a commercial advertisement and the person who called me for that job was a highly respected musician, his name is Jorge Taveras,” he stressed.

With Los Hijos del Rey, orchestra then conducted by maestro Dioni Fernández, he recorded merengues such as the emblematic "Yo me dominicanizo", by the prolific Puerto Rican composer Catalino Curet Alonso, affectionately Tite, "La pilandera" and "La vacuna", by Porfirio Ruiz, among others, as well as the sauces “El viento”, by Joe Nicolás, and the successful “Puchula”, by Ramoncito Díaz.

While performing in Puerto Rico with Los Hijos del Rey, an orchestra that was in conflict with another faction over the use of the name, Jeand'or, who was in some kind of limbo in the middle of the dispute, received a call by the composer Curet Alonso (who died in 2003), who mediated him to sing with Roberto Roena & Apollo Sound, and the artist told him that he would think about it because he had to speak with Ventura first, who has always been his advisor.

Another situation that put Jeand'or on the verge of joining a salsa orchestra: in the middle of a tour in Puerto Rico, trumpet player Nelson García, from Los Hijos del Rey, spoke to maestro Bobby Valentín to include the Aruban in his orchestra and the Puerto Rican star appreciated the singer's voice very much, but he already had Cano Extremera as his stellar sonero and didn't do anything about it.

Robert returned to his country for the birth of his son Robert Reinier, but a few months later Ventura convinced him to return to Santo Domingo and so, in 1983, he joined the orchestra of the popular Dominican artist and recorded some merengues, distinguishing itself as “Rebeca”, which has achieved considerable popularity in several Latin American countries.

In the same year, Robert Jeand'or recorded, with his orchestra La Nueva Fuerza, the album "N'ami Un Tiki / Mi Banana" for WBS Production, made in Aruba, with boleros, sauces and

merengues scattered in "T'abo ", " Mi sono ", " Panama me tombe ", " Aunque digas no ", " Se me olvidó tu nombre "...

“La Nueva Fuerza, Volume 2, Frío y Caliente” was his next bet, with the Zuni International label and recorded in the Dominican capital. In this production he mixed soca, merengue, son montuno, salsa and cumbia, with songs like "A ta combatize", "Yo te lo dije, mujer", "Le puntuane", "Isaela" and "Negros serremos", among other.

Around 1985, he formed his orchestra in Dominican land, performing as a singer, bassist, arranger and music producer, also contributing to several compositions. In that same year he launched the productions "Robert Jeandor y Su Orquesta" (1985), recorded in Puerto Rico for the Bronco label, with sauces such as "Pan con café", "El tirijala", "El milagro", "Pellizco ", " El borracho ", " Tomalo "...

He continued with "El Embajador" (1989), recorded in Santo Domingo, for the Robro company, where he combines merengues and sauces, with titles such as "Ta gusta bo a gusta", "El viaje" (Palmer Hernández), "Loco y sturdido "(Rento Arias), " Pa que lo baile usted ", " Don Alcides "and" Cuatro velas "and others. Almost all the songs are by Dominican authors and the arrangements are by Jeand'or himself and by maestro Ramón Orlando Valoy.

Then "Robert Jeand'or & La Nueva Fuerza / Mi Chalapy" (1990), recorded in Venezuela and supported by the Sonoindustrial label, with a mixture of sauces and merengues, such as "Alma dimi so", "Mi tin cua bai c une ", " Amor ", " Soledad ", " Ayer cuando te vi "and" Love won the beach ".

The following year, for the Sonotone record company and also with his orchestra La Nueva Fuerza, he launched the production "La cerveza", which, in addition to this song, contains, among others, "La negra Carmen", "Déjenme llorar ", " Salado y dulce ", " Alma negra ", " Aruba bon bon ", " La rica cumbia "and" Maribel ".

He made it clear that he had never been a musician or singer on the staff of La Nueva Fuerza, but rather recorded with this orchestra as a collaboration.

Always faithful to merengue and salsa, he released "Robert Jeand'or y Su Música Caribe", which he recorded in Aruba, sponsored by the Thoro label, whose songs include "El gallo arisco" (Fernando Echavarría), "Pepe" (Raffy Rosa). “La huella demi ayer” (Charlie Mosquea), “El vagabundo” (José Peguero), “San Pedro bendito”, “El floreo” and “Eso es lo que va”, the latter three composed by Jaime Shanlatte. All composers are Dominican.

Likewise, and with the La Nueva Fuerza orchestra, he recorded in Colombia the sauces “Estás pillao” and “El cubanito”, for Discos Orbe.

It is very likely that, since his arrival in the Dominican Republic and without prejudice to his other artistic conditions, the aspect that gave Robert Jeand'or the greatest prestige was his work in the recording studios, both participating in choirs, where His powerful and well tuned voice

stood out, directing both choristers and soloists, playing bass and arranging songs for different singers and groups.

"I joined recording studios as a musician, where I worked with great Dominican instrumentalists, participating in the recordings of a large number of orchestras, soloists, commercial advertisements ... and as an instrumentalist, playing bass and maracas, participating in choirs, directing their voices, making musical arrangements... It was our daily work ", he specified, letting that special glow shine on his face that only a soul immersed in memories can project.

He also points out that he had the opportunity to accompany master Johnny Pacheco, one of the times the legendary icon of salsa also traveled to his homeland, the Dominican Republic, as well as Cuban Iq Celia Cruz, who had the opportunity to accompany as bassist and backing vocalist on various occasions.

The contribution of the maestro Jeand'or to Dominican music is really frightening, in terms of quantity and quality. In those years he practically lived in recording studios and no one was surprised to see him record with the most colorful figures of Latin American popular music, especially the merengue and many salseros.

"Well, I've recorded for so many famous artists... Johnny Ventura, Juan Luis Guerra, Joseito Mateo, Félix del Rosario, Wilfrido Vargas, Los Hijos del Rey, Sergio Vargas, Alex Bueno, Sonia Silvestre, Maridalia Hernández, Víctor Víctor, Coco Band , Rubby Pérez, Bonny Cepeda, The New York Band, Iris & Franklin, Luis "Terror" Díaz, Los Kenton, Ray Polanco, Tommy Olivencia, Roberto Torres, Aníbal Bravo, July Mateo "Rasputín", Henry García, Carlos Alfredo Fatule, Carlos Manuel "El Zafiro", Richie Ricardo, Nicky Soul, La Artillería, Monchy Capricho, Juanchy Vásquez "El Galeno", Young Orchestra, Altamira Banda Show, Las Canelas, Los Hijos de Puerto Rico, Mayra & Celínés, Diveana, Freddy Kenton , Roland Roll, Raphy Pou, Sonny Cristal, Sonny Cristal... As a backing vocalist I recorded so many songs that I don't remember all of them; there are thousands of songs,

"There are so many singers and bands I've recorded with that I don't remember how many there are, but almost all of them are Dominican, Colombian, Aruban, Curazaleños, Costa Rican, Venezuelan, Ecuadorian, Panamanian, Haitian ... Many have recorded a single song and then they don't nothing more is known about them ", he expressed, noting that he also recorded a large amount of commercial advertisements for various companies.

As a composer, in addition to the songs he performed personally, he contributed with his own pieces that were added to the repertoires of various singers from his native land, written in Papiamento.

His contribution in the vocal part is so well known that it even tends to overshadow his performance as an arranger, a facet in which he has also demonstrated plausible work.

"I think "Negrito Kumba ", a composition by Marcos López, for Los Hijos del Rey, singing Jacinto Gantier and recorded in 1984, was the first musical arrangement I did in Santo

Domingo. I have made a large number of arrangements for dozens of artists and recorded hundreds of songs with these great Dominican musicians; there have also been several works for orchestras from Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries, many of merengue. Ah, I also made two arrangements and recorded the bass for Tommy Olivencia's orchestra: the merengue "Aha Uhu", by Ramoncito Díaz, and the calypso "Patsy", both songs vocalized by Frankie Ruiz", summarized this great artist.

In addition to those he has done for his orchestra, he has also produced musical arrangements for Juanchy Vásquez "El Galeno", Diveana, Mayra & Celinés, Lenny Pérez, Iris & Franklin...

At the end of 1990 he decided to return to the island where he was born and there he gave birth to his group, which is known as "Robert Jeand'or & Su Solo Banda Show", with which he dizzily positioned himself among the most requested and awarded. In this regard, he stressed that he had made the decision to return to his country because "sometimes your land calls you".

It didn't take him long to launch a production, which he called "Pura Salsa", where all the songs he recorded in the salsa wave appear, including "El viento", which, curiously, the Arubans did not believe that the person who she sang it was one of them, but they gave credit to a Dominican.

In 1992, his great friend Johnny Ventura traveled to Aruba mainly to present Robert Jeand'or with the "Den Ambiente Awards", a special recognition that highlights the merits that this emblematic Aruban artist has accumulated during his brilliant musical career.

"My greatest satisfaction in music is that I wanted to get there where the greatest of Latin music were and I don't complain about it, so much so that my first recording has remained, it is still valid today, it is the song "Yo me dominicanizo", of that great composer who was Don Tite Curet Alonso, may he rest in peace, what an honor for me! ", He expressed very excited.

Married since 1979 to the Aruban lady Viviana Geerman, with whom he had his son Robert Reinier, born in 1981, the artist is also the father of Anoushca Suheila Jean D'or Odor (1975), the result of a previous relationship.

The maestro ended the interview by expressing moving words, typical of a heart full of gratitude and with an immense desire to continue spreading his precious musical heritage.

"Since I returned to the island of Aruba I have created my own orchestra: I have never stopped making music because music is my life and I have to tell the fans of a lifetime that I love them and I will always love them because they are the ones there. they encourage us to continue in what God has commanded us to do in this world: to make the hearts of human beings rejoice," he said.

The Dominican people accumulate an enormous debt of gratitude towards this giant of popular music, who during a considerable part of his productive life put his abundant artistic talent in favor of the qualitative growth of the merengueros repertoire and beyond. Moreover, he has

always lavished sincere love for the Duarteian homeland and that is why he is Dominican like the mangu.